

Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars between Reform and Political Action

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Abstract: We aim through this work to clarify the objectives and principles of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars, which was founded in 1931 in Algeria as an extension of the movement of Jamal Edin Al-Afghani and Mohammed Abdou in the Arab Machreq. And, especially to, clarify the big difference winning among historians about the activity of the reform movement between reformist and political action. For that reason, we have to ask a set of questions: 1-What is the nature of the reform movement in Algeria between who gives it its rights and who denies it all activity related to national policy? 2 – What is the reform movement and what are its roots? 3-What is the nature of the program of work of the association? Does it contain political plans? 4-What is the contribution of the Association in the national movement and the Algerian Revolution of the first November 1954?

Key words: Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars • Abdelhamid Ibn Badis • Bachir Al Ibrahimi • Reform • Political activity

INTRODUCTION

The period of the twentieth century had experienced a political renaissance for the Algerians. After the developments that occurred in the world after the end of the First World War and the emergence of an elite of Algerians from various trends: deputies, reformers and migrant workers, political awareness began to take shape more and more through establishing parties and political formations with different tendencies, including the Association of the Algerian Muslim Scholars, which fixed its project of change and reform of the Algerian society during the colonial era that is based on Quranic education and social rehabilitation, taking for that modern shape through the establishment of a civic association in accordance with the decisions of the French law. The scholars intentionally refused the foundation of a political party, after having fixed the head of the disease in their opinion which is ignorance and illiteracy and being away from the teachings of the religion and that the head of the remedy is education and establishing the values of virtue.

In this context, Imam Ibn Badis God grant him mercy, says "We chose the religious plan rather than anything else thoughtfully and being attached to what is suitable for our nature and upbringing in relation to advice, guidance, spreading goodness, being united and going

on the right path. We managed to do that through our devotion to serve science and religion. We did our utmost to serve them properly and this for the sake of humanity in general. If we wanted to get into the political field, we would do it publicly and being set as examples because of our firmness and sacrifices. We worked hard to enable the whole nation to claim its rights..."[1]

By doing so, to what extent did the Association of Muslim Scholars remain away from politics in a difficult colonial period, requiring the combination of all efforts to get out of it?

Firstly: The Foundation of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars: The idea of creating an Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars had been crystallized more than ever before in the meeting of the club of promotion in 1931 on the occasion of the centenary commemoration of the celebration of France over a century of its occupation of Algeria. The latter was the impulse for the birth of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars and helped it to fulfill its national mission and people's support to it [2].

At eight o'clock on Tuesday morning, the fifth of May 1931, met in the club promotion seventy-two Algerian scholars and from various doctrinal trends, Malikites, Ibadists, reformers, Touroukists, officials and non officials [3].

Indeed, the purpose of this meeting was intended to achieve an idea the Algerian scholars had in mind among them sheikh, "Abdelhamid Ibn Badis ". The idea consists in establishing the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars and after the general meeting in which the statute of the association had been approved; a second meeting had taken place on Wednesday, the following day on 2 o'clock in the afternoon in order to elect a governing body.

The meeting of the elected administrative council had taken place in the absence of Sheikh "Abdelhamid Ibn Badis " in the first and second day and at 8 o'clock in the evening of the second day in order to elect the president and distribute the tasks to members.

Throughout these meetings the birth of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars had been announced with the presidency of Sheikh, "Abdelhamid Ibn Badis " in absence.

Sheikh "Mohammed Khaireddine " explains the reason of the absence of Ibn Badis as follows: " Ibn Badis got in touch with us telling us that he would disclaim the invitation concerning the meeting and that he would not attend its first day so as those who were present would invite him officially to attend the general meeting, thus he would be a guest rather than an inviter. Hence, he would avoid what might be as reactions on the part of the French authority in the country and those belonging to small mosques and those who adhered to it and feel embarrassed by any work carried out by «IbnBadis ", interpreting it as they wish.

In fact, the choice of «IbnBadis» was not at random, but this was for many reasons and idiosyncrasies that enabled him to win this post competently. He had a strong character and a good reputation that exceeded Constantine and spread all over the country. He was enthusiastic for its service and the service of his nation. He was also a skilful writer brilliant and orator and this is what qualified him to be trustworthy and the focus of respect and admiration of all the Algerians[3].

As for the reason of taking the capital the headquarters of the Association of Muslim Scholars is due to the fact that it was the headquarter of the administrative authority and being the center of " club promotion " in which the Association of Scholars was born, and whose members were the advocates of its founding. They also consolidated it morally and materially. This is, perhaps, because the scholar wanted to keep away the monopoly of the reform movement from him so as it will represent the Algerian country as a whole and not the reformers only[3].

When Sheikh, "Abdelhamid Ibn Badis " became president of the Association, he addressed people saying: " My brothers, I was considering myself property of Algeria, but today you added to my neck another property, I implore God to help me to do the right and the duty and then quoted the Almighty, saying:" God does not change the state of people until they change what is in them "[4].

Concerning the constitution of the association, it had been elaborated further to the meeting which took place between " IbnBadis " and " Al Ibrahimi " in 1924. It was translated into French to be handed in to the government [5].

There were many factors associated with the establishment of Association of Muslim Scholars, including the intervention of France in the affairs of the Islamic religion. The French administration in Algeria supervised the appointment of imams and supervisors of the mosques. They had to get together, attempting to face this way of doing things as far as interfering in their Islamic affairs is concerned and this was considered as a stab for the Arabism and Islam.

The Algerian society was impregnated of the ideas taken from the Quran and adopted by the biography of Muhammad through prophetic Hadith. The Algerians tried to find the character of legitimacy through the creation of a party or an association that materializes their ideas and make of Muslims a coherent group, starting from the alliance among the scholars of the nation and the cultivated young people, this is on the inside front.

On the external level, the Algerians had tried to imitate some of the European parties and this is what made some people believe that the Association had taken from these parties their form and structure, in spite of the existence of Zitouna Mosque which is considered the first school for some of the scholars of the association [6].

Therefore, the fifth of May 1931 marks the beginning and the continuity of the work of the Association according to its planned objectives, Islamic, Algerian and Arabic principles and its attitudes towards the different issues until its accession and melting in the National Liberation Front.

Secondly: The Association of Muslim Scholars- a Study of the Objectives and Principles: When studying the literature of the reforming scholars through their newspapers and magazines, we understand that the Association has put as a priority the release of the Islamic religion from the domination of the colonial administration and the freedom of missionary work in the mosques.

It also established free schools to teach Arabic and intensified its efforts to establish associations and clubs, in addition to encouraging the education of girls, believing in the role of woman in family and society[7].

Talking about the objectives of the Association leads us to talk about education. There was a consensus among most of researchers that its objectives were limited to free Arabic education, fighting against superstition and heresies and this is what appears in the words of " Ibn Badis " in 1935, "The Quran is our imam, Sunna is our way, good ancestors our ideals, the service of Islam and Muslims and the delivery of the good to all the inhabitants of Algeria is our goal "[8].

«MohammadKhaireddine," a member of the Association summarizes its objectives by saying: " Revival of Islam by reviving the Quran and Sunna, the revival of Arabic language and its literature and the revival of Islamic history and the effects of its leaders "[8].

However, one of the scholars linked it to political activity and anti- colonialism and work for the formation Algerian state [9].

The great Algerian politician FarhatAbbas, confirms that the objectives lie in the renewal of Islam and the fight against marabouts on the basis that they are a tool in the hands of colonialism, whereas the French historianCharles André Julian believes that the objectives of the association consist in understanding Arabic language and going back to Islamic culture. But some historians argue that this does not mean that politics was not among the objectives of the association, especially its first founders agreed on hiding the revolutionary political dimension and took for it a clear program based on three principles- Islam is our religion, Arabic is language and Algeria is our country and this is what made researches emphasize that the goal of the Association was centered on the religious and social side about reviving intellectual and religious renaissance based on the Quran and the Sunna, but in the political sphere it aimed at reviving an authentic national personality far from any effect [10].

There are those who believe that the program of the Association of Muslim Scholars may be summed in two main goals:

- Short-termgoal: Consisting in purifying Islam from the impurities and working for separating religion from state and fighting against the attempt to erase the Algerian personality of all kinds.
- Long-term goal: Consisting in the attempt to recover the independence of Algeria and form an Islamic Arab State. " IbnBadis ", said in 1936, stressing the

fact that the goal of the existence of the association is to ensure Algerian personality and this appears in saying: "We have to combine politics and science and science and religion cannot develop unless politics develops".

"MohammedKhaireddine" and "Ahmed Tawfiq Al Madani" attributed the goals of the association to achieving independence and freeing the country [11].

Al Ibrahim summed the objectives of the association by saying: "The association of scholars servesIslam through reforming its beliefs and demanding the independence of its jurisdiction. It also asks for the freedom of education, defending Algerian self which is expressed through Islam and Arabism gathered in a country," in addition to what is stated in his speech at the general meeting of the Association of Algerian Muslim Scholars: " Your association is founded for twohonorable goals, having in the heart of every Arab Muslim in this country an incomparable place and they are reviving the glory of Islam and Arabic language "[12].

Professor AmmarBouhouchesummarizes its principles as follows: [13]

- Reviving Islamic religion and purifying it from impurities attached to it.
- The development of the Arab - Islamic culture.
- Unification of the Algerian people under the banner of Arabism and Islam.
- Sensitizing the Algerian young people of the Algerian personality and preparing them to militate in the future.
- Establishing cooperation between Algeria and the Arab and Islamic countries.
- Unification of common work with the people of Tunisia and Morocco.
- Spreading an Arab education inspired from the Islamic Arab unity.

Among the main objectives and principles of the Association is to fight Sufism orders that were often exploited by the colonizer to tarnish the Islamic religion. The charter of the association was stipulating thefollowing:

«Islam is a religion of humanity as a whole, real Sunna is the interpretation of the Quran, Mohammad is the best of creation, monotheism is the basis of religion, maraboutism is a heresy which means the exploitation of man and killing the mind ".

As for the means and methods of activity, they can be summarized in press, mosques and schools, in addition to clubs and associations. The association addressed the human mind through science and reform, passion of religion, rhetoric and history. It created a multitude of preachers and orators and historians and created for this a group of preachers, orators, historians and journalists. The mosques and schools were as its essential means to spread its ideas [14].

It is noticeable that " IbnBadis " used the tools of the epoch to transmit his message such as press, in addition to his lessons and lectures. He used the newspaper "El Mountakid " as a tool to explain the correct Islamic concepts and on this basis, Professor " Abu al-QasimSaad Allah " says: "The scholars had a program of three religious corners: social and political, although the latter were not explicit to them"[15].

Perhaps the means of the society's activities were often subject to circumstances, it has relied in thirties on other means of protest, interviews and sending delegations, travels and participation in public gatherings such as the protest of scientists against the newsletter of "Michel" and the decision of " Reny" and its participation in the Islamic congress in 1936 in Algeria.

The reform movement has chosen the Islamic missionary work method that was not absent in its scientific content of the political thought under the cover of religion, that is, it was seeking to spread political awareness in a cultural religious mould. Al Ibrahimi said: «... The liberation of minds is the basis for the liberation of bodies and it is impossible for anybody to be set free, carrying a slave mind". [16].

In fact, " Ibn Badis " had adopted for the reformation of the Algerian society an approach based on modesty and kindness towards people, tolerance with them and optimism, relying on the creator on the one hand and the self- on the other hand and firmness concerning right and the courage that has no limit.

Thirdly: Political Activity of the Association of Muslim Scholars 1931 - 1954: Both historian EIDjilali Sari and MahfoudKeddach say that the attitudes of the scholars at the level of political commitment remained different and varied from one Sheikh to another.

In fact, a lot of researchers who did not understand the references and ideas of the Association forbid it from exercising political activity, on the basis that religious scholars have no view concerning politics, but the one

who studies deeply the political thought of the Association will understand better the reality and depth of its political approach adapted to the conditions of Algerian society.

In fact, the Association thought that political activity at this stage should have a dimension related to civilization to respond to the French Arabism project, which worked for the abolition of the historical presence of the Algerian people, through the integration and naturalization. The good policy in the view of scholars is in saving the Algerian people from this civilization dead-end [17] and establishing political relations with the political forces inside and outside the country [18].

Some researchers believe that it is possible to differentiate between the Association's political attitude before and after the fifties. Before this period, the political positions have been taken in a collective way, but then they have been taken individually.

However, there are those who do not believe in the political activity of the Association at all because the period of thirties and during the revolution such as Ahmed Mehas.

If we adopt the view in favour of practicing politics on the part of scholars, Ahmad Meryouch believes that this was due to pressures exerted by the colonial administration on the Islamic religion and scholars. Concerning this " Bachir Al Ibrahimi " says: " colonialism says that it is a political association in the guise of a religious covering nationalism... and hiding nationality...".

Ahmed Al-Khatib says that understanding the activity of the Scholars Association in the political sphere, we must follow the evolution of this activity in two phases, the first phase extending from the date of the foundation of the association in 1931 until the death of Ibn Badis in 1940, while the second phase extends from the end of the first stage and until the beginning of the Algerian revolution in 1954[19].

A - Era of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis: The scholars often worked with reference to the advice of Mohammed Abdou. Ibn Badis had a doctrine on this basis and since his presidency of the association, he showed interest in politics. He managed to absorb the anger of the population of Constantine in 1934 and this is what indicates the tendency of the association to political activity, which emerged in particular on its page., «AlIbrahimi says concerning this, »:«If the religious man abandoned politics, who would run it. »

However, there are some historians who believe that the Association did not interfere in the political affairs directly until the year 1936, especially with the advent of the Popular Front government which showed when arriving at power openness to the demands of the Algerian political class, where the Association of Algerians Muslim Scholars emerged as a coherent political bloc [19], where it had an opinion in the Islamic conference, through its active participation in it.

In fact, this participation is still a controversial point between those who condemned it and those who encouraged this and believed that the association entered politics from its wide door, especially with reference to its emphasis in this statement, «Policy concerns the whole nation and the association is part of the nation» [20].

Professor Ahmad Sari from Constantine University says that the delegation formed at the time of the Islamic conference, met the men of the state of France, the French press and the men of North African Star and this was an opportunity for the scholars to make the French politicians know what was happening in Algeria[20].

Professor Abu Al-QasimSaad Allah confirms that France refused the demands of the Association despite its moderation and this is what strengthened the convergence between the association and the People's Party when it was founded in 1937, in addition to that the Association responded to the Farhat Abbas when he denied the existence of the Algerian nation, confirming through the words of its leader Ibn Badis that it was formed centuries ago and that the nation is not French, it cannot be French and it does not want to be French [21].

On this basis, the great Algerian thinker MalikIbnNabi believes that scholars should be entrusted with the people's interest, but they handed on the deposit to others and he confirms that they handed it on to those who put it under his feet to be a ladder to climb over it to reach political posts and accused it of skidded into the field of politics and it lost its principles [22].

Some of the contemporaries of Ibn Badis confirm that he was declaring his intention to carry out a revolution, among them was, " Mohammed Oulhaj " under the pretext that he heard one day, " Ibn Badis " in one of the boards of the Islamic School of Education and teaching of Constantine, saying: "If they asked for my advice, listened to me and acted according to what I would say I would advise them to join the Aures mountains together and announce the armed revolution "[23].

If what had been said previously is related to the activities and attitudes of the political association, it would have taken a lot of positions on some issues, such as naturalization, integration and supporting France in its war against the Germans.

Concerning naturalization, it was considered by the Association of Muslim Scholars as something against Islam and it may be taken for heresy. As for this, it exposed in the conference the issue of naturalization without abandoning the civil status and launched their news papers as " El Chihab": "We are between life and death," ; there was a warning regarding the risk of naturalization [24].

As regards, the position of Scholars regarding integration, " Ibn Badis " considered it as a real threat to the existence of the Algerian nation, however they accepted the political part in the project of integration within the context of French laws, in which " Ibn Badis " distinguished between national nationality and stressed the fact that the first concerns the overall social and cultural features that characterize a particular human community, whereas the second concerns civil and political conditions specific to this community. He acknowledged the possibility of establishing a union between two peoples of different species, if each one of them would accept the ties generated by common political nationality[25].

As regards, the last political positions of" Ibn Badis ", the one who works on the literature of the reformist movement in Algeria in the late thirties, may understand the position committed to silence towards the Association's support to France in the World War II, on the one hand and on the other hand stopping its newspapers so as not to be in harmony with France, especially he was thinking of planning the declaration of the independence of Algeria from France, but his death prevented that.

B – Era of Bachir Al Ibrahimi: After the death of " IbnBadis " "Bachir Al Ibrahimi " was elected as president of the Association in absentia and he occupied this post until the outbreak of the liberation revolution. Professor " Abu Al-QasimSaad Allah « saysthat his first contributions were his preparation in the Algerian communiqué that was prepared by " Farhat Abbas," and when the reforms commission visited Algeria for the second time in December 1943 at the request of general " Charles de Gaulle " and taking the opinion of Al Ibrahimi was something important, he answered them in a report dated on 13/01/1944[26].

As an outcome of the massacres of May 8, 1945, Allbrahimi, Farhat Abbas and others were taken to prisons, until they were released after the issue of Amnesty Act on March 16, 1946 to begin a new period of political action. A general meeting of the Association of scholars was held in September 1946 in which he announced the continuation of the Association of its activities. The first thing, " Al Ibrahimi " has done was seeking to unite the parties in 1947 and he went with " AL ArbiTebassi " to meet " Messali Al Haj " on the occasion of the parliamentary elections and said to him: "He hopes that the word of the Algerian political parties would be unified in the elections so as not to disperse the efforts and allow the enemy to win"

The scholars had their opinion concerning the Algerian constitution of 1947, the defense front of liberty and the role of political parties once they failed in the elections and parliamentary representation and finally their failure realize the aspirations of the Algerian people concerning freedom and independence [27].

Actually, the political action was a corner of its activities, especially for its real and public aim against the French administration concerning the right of Algerians to education in general and the claim that the colonial administration should abandon Islamic affairs and reject colonial policy calling for naturalization. Professor " Saad Allah Abu Al-Qasim" said that these attitudes seem to some people as being non-political, but reformist ones, especially as it was declared from the beginning that it would not interfere in politics, as well as its confidence in French democracy and made alliance with communists and Jews against this administration [28].

While the Association denies being a part of political party, " Malek ben Nabi " confirms this relationship, although he shows this act in saying: "The reform movement had to raise above the mud of politics and the greed of elections, "Al Ibrahimi " responded to this, saying: "The injustice towards the Association was justified; the Association was aware of the fact of imposing a battle on the Algerian people at a stage where self conditions for the battle were not fulfilled, but rather there was something in it that might mean suicide. However, the work of the Association was focused on making the colonialism miss the opportunity by feinting it to reveal its methods[.]

Fourthly: The Position of Men of the Association from the Outbreak of the Revolution: The outbreak of the revolution on November 1, 1954 was a great surprise for the Algerian people and all political formations known on

the Algerian scene and the colonial administration, especially those who started the revolution and acted secretly. The Association of Muslim Scholars was in the front of those formations that were not aware of the events[.], especially its members who were abroad.

What was exposed in the editorial of Al Bassair issued on November 5, 1954 expresses the astonishment of the Association and the psychological state of its prominent members and in this context "Al Foudil Al Wartalani" says " Up till now, we do not have convincing details about these incidents and their causes "[30].

"Mohammed Al Arbi Al Zebry " says " As a result, the leadership of the Association committed a mistake against the revolution because of its spontaneous opposition to what came in the communiqué of November 1, 1954 "[31].

In fact, the supporters of the Association of Muslim Scholars split into two trends in their position concerning the outbreak of the revolution, that is, there were different reactions on the part of the Association among its members at home and abroad and this was due, according to some researchers to the fact that the support of a work of such confidentiality requires from people who are wise to take time before expressing their support and this entails knowing its sources.

The first trend believed that people who started the revolution lacked seriousness in their demands and this trend called the French authorities to accelerate the global reforms based on justice, equality and respect of the constants of the Algerian people [31].

The second trend has announced its support for the revolution, calling for the Algerian people to respond to the call of the National Liberation Front and this trend made a communiqué in this regard and it was signed by about 800 teachers from the teachers of the Association. "Al ArbiTebessi " was one of the prominent elected for the revolution as he was presented in the communiqué of the Association of the Algerian Muslim Scholars which was signed by Sheikh Al Ibrahimi in Cairo on 08/11/1954 in which he called for joining the Revolution[32].

History records that the Association acted rapidly supporting the revolution and «AlArbiAl Zebiri» emphasizes that a group of the members of the Association were joined early the ranks of the National Liberation Front and had important posts in the revolution, especially in Constantine. Among them, we cite, for example, Mr. "Ibrahim Mezhudi " who attended Sumam conference, Mr. " Mohammed Al Mili ", Sheikh " Hamani Ahmed ", " TaharHaouet", Sheikh " BerkaniAbderrammane" and others who responded promptly to the call of November 1, 1954 [33].

Thus, we can say that the Association of Scholars was in the avant-garde to support the revolution and its chairman Sheikh, " Bachir Al Ibrahimi " was with the members of the Association. They continued to defend the principles of the Association and the right of the Algerian people to enjoy their political civilization personality outside the French colonial crucible. Sheikh «AlBachir Al Ibrahim» was for this principle, whether in Algeria or abroad and when the people announced its revolution Sheikh «AlBachir Al Ibrahimi " was the first leader to support it even though he was in the east, away from the country.

Embracing the revolution to which refers Dr. "Aboul-KassemSaadallah" has manifested itself in more than one position of the Scholars of the Association, both in the country and abroad, especially "Bachir Al Ibrahimi " and " Foudil Al Wartalani ".

The latter's book «RebelliousAlgeria» contained the following:«To the rebellious heroes of the sons of Algeria today is life or death survival or extinction « and it was signed by the Bureau of the Association in Cairo.

Inside the country, the position of the Association supporting the revolution consisted in the annual conference of the Association held on 07/01/1956, under the title of «Colonialism is responsible for everything ". It was a communiqué highlighting the support of the conference for the revolution. It was signed by both of «AlArbi AlTebessi " and " Ahmad Tawfiq Al Madani ".

It was noticeable through the communiqué that the Association did not ask France for independence directly, trying to prove its political presence. The Scholars did not consider the members of the Association the only representatives of the Algerian people.

In fact, most of the researchers considered that the views Al Ibrahimi and Al Wartalani do not express the views of the Association, but are individual views.

Among the salient results achieved by the National Liberation Army after the attacks of 20/08/1955 and their success are that the Association of Muslim Scholars announced in 07/01/1956 its dissolution of itself and joining the ranks of the National Liberation Front, thus the Association and the front become two sides of the same coin.

CONCLUSION

The association was committed to education, spreading awareness, blowing up superstitions and establishing true faith. The front was committed to the organization of young people, getting them used to the rigors of life and assuming responsibilities and difficulties.

Prof. "Saad Allah" says that without those scholars who believed in their Lord and their homeland Algeria would be without an Association of Scholars and as a feather in the blow of wind and many of those who started the revolution of liberation were graduates from the School of the Association of Scholars.

The one who studies the history of the revolution would be aware of the fact that the Association of Scholars contributed greatly to the liberation revolution. There were those who joined the mountains and those who went abroad and continued militating in the ranks of the front. Some others remained in prisons until independence. There were those who were assassinated by the French authorities such as Sheikh "Al Arbi AlTebessi ", Prof. "RabiaBouchama ", " Secretary Al Amoudi", " Ahmed Reda Houhou " and others.

In fact, many of the official writings and some non-specialized writings say that the Association of Scholars did not support the revolution until 1956, but there were a lot of communiqués in support of the revolution, calling for joining and granting it victory, issued by the figures of the Association.

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